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Shakespeare's Reputation as Universal

Abstract: Shakespeare's works are of universal significance and highly superior to those of his contemporaries as a result of his wonderful poetry, his sympathetic humanity and broad mindedness, his masterful understanding of human nature which eternally remains the same. Human beings come and go but human nature continue to exist the same. He is applauded for his representation of general nature in his literary products. Dr. Samuel Johnson and Ben Johnson are all praise for him due to generality in his works. His literary works contain energetic characters, lifelike themes, realistic dialogues and real life experiences. He never cares for the rules for true tragedy and comedy rather endeavours to depict the genuine life. He has never been under consultance of other literary models and their works rather he gets hold of his subjects, characters and their experiences from the real life. Insight into human nature and realism manifests his brilliance. Shakespeare will be eulogized as long as we get hold of keen intelligence and admiration.

In his own time William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was rated as one among many accomplished playwrights and poets, but since the late 17th century he has been examined the foremost playwright and poet of the English language. True is the saying, “ The tale of someone's life begins before they are born.” Unquestionably there are innumerable things about Shakespeare's artistry and career about which the most delegate intellectuals are not

conscious and cannot express in words but the universality in his works of art is familiar to all.

It is just portrayal of general nature that brings immortality and enduring appreciation to literary works. Shakespeare is more than anyone else, a versifier of nature. Through his works, he reflects life. His characters are not associated with the society of particular region or time, they are omnipresent depicting every man, they are the genuine progeny of common humanity such as will always live ever in the world and whom our eyes will always continue to meet as “ nothing can please many and please long but just the representation of general nature”¹ (150). Shakespeare is predominant among all writers, the lyricist that hold up to his readers a trustworthy mirror of manners and of life.

In his works the conversation being shown is not accidental. But dialogues are occasioned by the occurrence which produced it. Dialogues are so genuine that we sometimes fail to think that we are merely reading an imaginary work of fiction. Experiences too, are universal. “ Love is not all in all in his plays. Love is only one of the many passions and his plays mirror life, they represent other passions as well”² (190) .Thus his plays expand our knowledge of human nature. He depicts human attitude and values in human language. From his plays even an ascetic may reckon the transaction of the world. His artistic pieces prove that “ the greatness of Shakespeare consists chiefly in his ability to create men and women, who, if not imitations of reality, have the vividness of living characters”³(7) .

Besides portraying the general nature, he is used to blend tragic and comic components which sometimes considered the demerit of his dramas. It is not his dereliction rather demonstrates the universality in his works. He always makes an attempt to represent the lifelike picture of life which is itself a combination of sorrows as well as of joys. The acknowledged critic of neo-classical age, Dr. Johnson elucidates this characteristic of Shakespeare’s plays. Life is an ebb and flow of despair and prosperity, good and evil in

various amalgamations and permutations. Hence a true picture of life should consist of both, such an associated expression of existence is unexceptionable, the loss of one is the achievement of another. Writers of classical age were used to write tragedies and comedies as well. Yet no single Greek or Roman author has strived to depict both the aspects either in the same framework. Shakespeare's skill is evident in his power to give rise to happiness and sorrow through the same drama. No other writer has employed such a universal appeal. Of his temperament, it can be proclaimed ed that “ he had in an absolute form, the invitation for gathering every unconditioned trifle and every weighty matter, that could profit his art; with in addition the concentration which is a necessary attribute of genius”⁴ (153) .

Ben Johnson cherished this universal appeal of Shakespeare's artistic products. He has the opinion that Shakespeare can not be affixed to an age but for all time, not merely a poet of England, but of humanity. “ Lives in his issue, even so the race of Shakespeare's mind and manners brightly shines.” So he was naturally intellectual, he was not in the requirement of spectacle of books to read nature. He gazed inside and found her there. Nothing in his works is kind of second hand, nothing is acquired or copied out from others , since no writer among his contemporaries is as genius as Shakespeare, who has so much novelty to his age or nation . He can be truly called the architect of English drama. He was the most valued of all dramatic versifiers, especially for his great insight into human nature and his naturalism. Shakespeare was being upraised by the reverential description of the Romantics into unique poetic intellectual, prophet and bard. Critics of romantic age refactored him into an object of almost religious devotion or “bardolatory” , who reached to great heights and whose plays were to be “ worshipped” as not “ merely great works of art”, but as “ phenomenon of nature like the sun and the sea, the stars and flowers” and with “ entire submission of our own faculties.”

He is primarily a poet of life. Shakespeare has welcomed the gross and the gold, the charms and the unpleasant altogether. He gets hold the talent of inclusiveness. As a true product of Renaissance period Shakespeare really loves the life. No human is unfamiliar to him. It is in this welcome of life in its fullness that we detect one of the hints to Shakespeare's universality. He is truly a poet of the eternal verities, the consonants, the everlasting passions, the real pain. The human soul in intense passion has revealed itself in his works, and men and women, irrespective of age and context, have found in them an echo of their own emotions- their laughter and tears, passions and prejudices, desires and ambitions. Shakespearean plays are not indolent songs of an empty day. They contain such a kind of revealing properties as are strenuous to be found anywhere else. They move beneath the exterior of human tale and evoke, isolate or obscure whatever segments of timeless beauty and truth they may have in possession. They are certainly, realistic presentations of life. They are a meditation upon or spiritual illustration of life.

Shakespeare's skill of depicting universality also consists in his broad compassion towards humanity. He never sits in judgment upon his companions. A man, he affirms, is a man for all that. Shakespeare is never effected by resentment. Not a social reformer or frowning moralist, he never makes an attempt to convert his reader or audience to his own opinion, for he has none. Shakespeare has never thought of employing his plays as an agreeable pulpit from which to preach sermon. He always keeps friendly approach to man, with all his meanness and limitations. Shakespeare was undoubtedly a master of human psychology although the world itself was not familiar in his day. It is his universal humanity, his all embracing comprehension of each human emotion and instinct, which has formed Shakespeare what he is – the greatest philosopher of the human heart ever known. He is prominent for all time because the scholar-equally with the layman, realizes at a glance his true worth and loyal portrayal of the deep moves of human action to be found in the apt

workings of the mind. What Shakespeare deals with is full length and breadth of human life and characterization with all its complexity and variety. Which part of human experience and which segment of human sensibility has Shakespeare left unmarked? In his dramas, one meets every character and his deep sorrow as well as revenge spirit in Hamlet, a friend's betrayal in Julius Caesar, withcraft in Macbeth, appetite for power and rule in Othello, tragic pathos of King Lear, "Shakespeare was the man, who of all moderns and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul "⁵(70). Although there have been revolutionary differences in our material aspects yet human nature remains alike. Empires were built and destroyed; social and economic factors have undergone sea changes, but the same heartbeats can be heard through the centuries. Shakespearean plays are a documentation of those eternal heartbeats. It is also a vivid affirmation of the eternal and undying values of man's unconquerable mind.

It is his poetry that has a skillful quality. Shakespeare's "incomparable poetry" is one of those attributes which have rendered his work of universal appeal. Shakespeare's richness can be seen in his high imagination which we are unable to see in any of his contemporaries. He is the supreme poet in any age of great poetry, because his poetry is wider in range and deeper in feeling than that of his contemporaries. He touches mood of graceful sentiment. Shakespeare possesses innate knowledge of all the nuances of meaning and art of their perfect ordering. Shakespeare employs the technique of interchanging of verse and prose which again makes his work universal. The same character may communicate sometimes in verse and sometimes in prose, depending upon the mood. Shakespeare's perception of life, his astonishing characterization, his comprehensive humanity, his sense of humour and tolerance, his catholicity of outlook, his powerful art have all established a persuasive expression in his splendid poetry, that is why Shaw admitted that he wished, he could write a drama like that of Shakespeare. The greatness of Shakespeare lies in the fact that he speaks

with his audience through space and time. From all cultures we go back to him for the prognosis of our dreams, for the unexpected echo of our inhibitions, for the expression of our fears or the eloquence of our hopes. He is the most comprehensive writer through ages.

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